A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF STUDENT SATISFACTION LEVEL IN DISTANCE LEARNING AND LIVE CLASSROOM AT HIGHER EDUCATION LEVEL

Dr. Azhar MAHMOOD
Post-Doctorate (USA)
Department of Education
International Islamic University Islamabad, PAKISTAN

Sheikh Tariq MAHMOOD
Lecturer
Department of Education
International Islamic University Islamabad, PAKISTAN

Dr. Allah Bakhsh MALIK
Head Department of Education
National University of Modern Languages, Islamabad, PAKISTAN

ABSTRACT

The technology has embraced the innovative learning methodologies. Distance Learning has taken the place of traditional face-to-face educational environment. The purpose of this study was to compare the level of student satisfaction of graduate distance learning educational psychology course to a traditional classroom educational psychology course taught by the same instructor. Population of the study consisted of Graduate students in course educational psychology during fall semester 2009. Study was descriptive in nature and findings were drawn after the descriptive analysis. Likert scale was used to determine the level of satisfaction between both groups. On the basis of findings, It was concluded that distance learning and traditional classroom students experienced a high level of satisfaction .It was determined that there was very slightly difference in the levels of student satisfaction in the distance learning and traditional classroom students.

Keywords: **Distance Learning, Traditional Classroom Learning, Student Satisfaction, Instruction, Higher Education**

INTRODUCTION

The traditional delivery system for higher education has been a classroom setting with a professor giving a lecture and students listening and writing notes. Interaction between the professor and student has been viewed as an essential learning element within this arrangement. However, innovations in educational delivery mechanisms have challenged this paradigm.

Advances in information technology are enabling little used educational delivery methods such as distance learning to gain new life (Mallesy, 1999). On the other hand, Distance education is a powerful and growing force in education at university level. In distance education the student is remote from the campus, and is educated through a mixture of media, the specially prepared printed text being central.

Depending on resources, a wide variety of other media can be used, notably TV, video, and the personal computer, all of which can be located at study centers and shared by a number of students(McNally, 1997).

Many institutions of higher learning have adopted distance and on-line education as the next logical step in educational delivery systems. These systems are being promoted as the educational pedagogy of the future. Some experts have gone as far as to predict that the "residential based model," that is, students attending classes at prearranged times and locations will disappear in the near future (Blustain, Goldstein, and Lozier 1999 and Drucker 1997).

REVIEW LITERATURE

Historical Background

According to Valentine (2002), before any discussion of distance learning, we need to look at the way the term has been defined in the past and how it is currently defined in the literature. The term can be used to describe any of a number of instructional situations. Although it is thought of as a new term, distance learning has been around for well over 100 years. One of the earlier forms of distance learning was done through correspondence courses started in Europe. This stayed the primary means of distance learning until the middle of this century when instructional radio and television became more popular (Imel, 1996).

As technology has changed, so has the definition of distance learning. Videotaped lectures have been a standard in university and professional courses for the last two decades (Moore & Lockee, 1998). Audiotapes and lessons sent through the mail have been used in correspondence courses to teach subjects such as foreign language for quite some time (Teaster & Blieszner, 1999). Today, the Internet and compressed video have taken distance learning in new directions, allowing distance learning to occur in real time. Live video instruction is the most popular and fastest growing delivery mode in the United States (Ostendorf, 1997).

Definitions of Distance Learning

With the history of distance learning encompassing so many different learning environments, we need to find a definition that fits in all situations. There have been many definitions put forward in modern literature. Greenberg (1998) defines contemporary distance learning as "a planned teaching/learning experience that uses a wide spectrum of technologies to reach learners at a distance and is designed to encourage learner interaction and certification of learning" (pg. 36).

Teaster and Blieszner (1999) say "the term distance learning has been applied to many instructional methods: however, its primary distinction is that the teacher and the learner are separate in space and possibly time" (p. 741). Desmond Keegan (1995) gives the most thorough definition. He says that distance education and training result from the technological separation of teacher and learner which frees the student from the necessity of traveling to "a fixed place, at a fixed time, to meet a fixed person, in order to be trained" (p. 7). From these definitions we can see that the student and teacher are separated by space, but not necessarily by time.

This would include compressed video, which is delivered in real time. As stated earlier, this type of live video instruction is the fastest growing means of distance learning today. Because of this, much of the discussion here will be dedicated to the promises and problems of this technology.

Quality of Instruction

The first issue is the quality of instruction that is given through distance learning programs. Much of the quality of instruction depends on the attitude of the administration and the instructor. Study by Elliot Inman and Michael Kerwin (1999) showed instructors had conflicting attitudes about teaching distance education. They report that after teaching one course, the majority of instructors were willing to teach another, but that they rated the quality of the course as only equal or lower quality than other classes taught on campus. Many times it seems that the administration believes the technology itself will improve the quality of the class. Palloff and Pratt (2000) remind us that "technology does not teach students; effective teachers do" (pg. 4). They make the point that the issue is not technology itself, but how it is used in the design and delivery of courses. Too often instructors do not design their lessons to take advantage of the technology presented. This affects the quality of the instruction. Research suggests that the effectiveness of distance learning is based on preparation, the instructor's understanding of the needs of the students, and an understanding of the target population (Omoregie, 1997).

Sherritt (1996) found in her survey of higher education administrators that many of the decision makers view distance programs as second rate, a "necessary but deficient form of education" (pg.2). She writes that this attitude also was found in academic departments that "have no strong mandates to adjust their curriculum and instruction to fit distance learning beyond cursory cooperation" (pg. 2). There are no rewards for doing so and the effort takes away from research time.

Sherrit also cites a study by Caffarella et al. done in 1992, which found off campus instructors to be "a demoralized bunch, perceiving poor working conditions, isolation, personal and professional deprivation" (p.3). This attitude hardly seems conducive to an effective learning environment for the students. If the administration and instructors are lacking in true commitment, it is bound to have a negative influence on the entire distance learning experience.

Two Schools of Thought

Another important consideration for the instructor is their view regarding the goal of distance education. There are two main thoughts on this. Schlosser and Anderson (1994, cited in Imel, 1998) put this thought forward in a review of distance education literature.

They submit that the goal of distance education in the United States is "to offer the distance student an experience as much like that of traditional, face-to-face instruction as possible" (pg. 3). This would mean that distance learning pedagogy would not differ much from that used in an ordinary classroom. Bates (1995) has a different idea. He suggests that instead of using technology to replicate traditional methods, it should be used to improve instruction. Holmberg (1989) also discusses these two schools of thought and concludes that distance education as a mode of education in its own right has very different consequences (than viewing it as a substitute for face-to-face instruction). The instructor must decide which attitude they will adopt because it has a profound impact on their approach to instruction.

The Role of Distance Learning In Educational Innovation

Open and distance learning has a major impact on thinking and practice throughout the whole educational system, regarding such critical matters as how students learn, how they can best be taught, and how educational resources might more efficiently be organized to deliver the instruction that is needed.

Open and distance learning is closely linked to innovation in information and communication technologies, to the identification of new learning needs and new ideas about how information may be accessed and applied in the information society. In particular open and distance learning has the potential to enhance a more student-centered and consumer-oriented approach to education, leading in turn to more extensive contact between educational institutions on the one hand and community-based organizations, business and industry on the other (Moore and Tait, 2002).

Open and distance learning has the potential to generate new patterns of teaching and learning. Strongly linked with developments in information and communication technologies, it is close to the development of new learning needs and new patterns of information access and application and learning. There is evidence that it can lead to innovation in mainstream education, and may even have effects beyond the realm of education itself. Open and distance learning therefore plays an especially decisive role in the creation of the global knowledge-based society ((Moore & Tait, 2002).

Lionarakis (2003) conducted a research on comparative study between open distance and conventional education. The results of the research were grouped in six comprehensive indicators of the quality of the learning experience under the following headings: interaction of learning material, the course structure, assignments, support provided by the Tutor Counselor, administrative support, and quality of the Tutor Counselor.

The average values obtained for these indicators varied between 2, 25 and 3, 97 in the conventional education, and 3, 38 to 4, 60 in ODE. With slight deviations, the preliminary results of the research did not show any significant differences in the quality of the learning experience between these two educational systems.

Higher Education

The provision of higher education through open and distance learning is recognized as an effective step towards the democratization of education.

It is also an important contribution to the development of higher education, notably in its modernization and diversification, encouraging the search for alternative delivery systems, including ways of updating knowledge and of providing advanced training so that institutions of higher education may serve as centres of lifelong learning permanently accessible to all (Moore & Tait, 2002).

METHODOLOGY

The population for this study consisted of graduate students who were enrolled in Allama Iqbal Open University's distance learning and International Islamic University's traditional classroom programs during fall semester 2009 in course of educational Psychology and completed their course in this session. Both courses were taught by the same instructor.

Eighty students from each programme were randomly selected as a sample. After reviewing the Distance Learning Student Response Questionnaire (DLSRQ) and Student Survey Form (SSF), developed by the Office of Institutional Research at ERAU for the purpose of gathering data, a Likert scale comprised 09 validated questions related to the distance learning and classroom learning was used to collect data.

Items addressing satisfaction were measured using a 5-point scale where 5 (Very Satisfied), 4 (Satisfied), 3 (Neutral), 2 (Dissatisfied) and 1 (Very Dissatisfied).

DATA ANALYSIS

Level of Student Satisfaction in Distance Learning (DL) and Traditional Classroom Learning (TL)

Table showed that 87% respondents of distance learning indicated high level of satisfaction about Instructor achieved stated objectives of the course well and 13% were disagree, where as 89% respondents of traditional learning indicated high level of satisfaction about "Instructor achieved stated objectives of the course well" and 11% were disagree, 85% respondents of distance learning indicated high level of satisfaction about

Item Frequencies, Cumulative Strongly Agree (SA) and Agree (A) Percentages and Mean

Items	VS %	S %	N %	DS %	VDS %	VS+S %	Mean
Instructor achieved stated objectives of the course well							
DL	43	27	1	5	4	87.0	4.2
TL	46	25	0	6	3	89.0	4.6
Instructor was well prepared for each class session	44	24	3	3	1	85.0	4.1
DL	45	27	2	2	4	90.0	4.3
TL							
Instructor provided meaningful, timely feedback to students							
DL	40	20	2	4	14	75.0	3.8
TL	47	26	3	3	1	91.0	4.4
Instructor was readily available for consultation with students							
DL	44	25	2	4	5	86.0	4.2
TL	48	26	0	5	1	92.0	4.4
Instructional materials used by instructor were of high quality							
DL	45	25	2	5	3	87.0	4.3
TL	47	24	1	6	2	89.0	4.3
Assignments/projects appropriate for course	50	21	1	5	3	89.0	4.3
DL	46	24	3	4	3	87.5	4.3
TL							
Accessibility of resources to complete assignments							
DL	42	21	2	11	4	79.0	4.0
TL	51	22	1	5	1	91.0	4.5
Amount of student to student interaction							
DL	40	21	3	13	3	76.0	4.0
TL	49	26	0	4	1	93.0	4.5
The degree to which the student is satisfied with the course and what has been learnt	46	26	1	5	2	90.0	4.3
DL	45	28	1	3	3	91.0	4.3
TL							

N (80+80) =160

"Instructor was well prepared for each class session" and 15% were disagree while 90% respondents of traditional learning indicated high level of satisfaction about "Instructor was well prepared for each class session" and 10% were disagree, 75% respondents of distance learning indicated high level of satisfaction about "Instructor provided meaningful, timely feedback to students" and 25% were disagree while 91% respondents of traditional learning indicated high level of satisfaction about "Instructor provided meaningful, timely feedback tostudents" and 9% were disagree, 86% respondents of distance learning indicated high level of satisfaction about "Instructor was readily available for consultation with students" and 14% were disagree while 92% respondents of traditional learning indicated high level of satisfaction about "Instructor was readily available for consultation with students" and 8% were disagree, 90% respondents of distance learning indicated high level of satisfaction about "Instructional materials used by instructor were of high quality " and 10% were disagree while 91% respondents of traditional learning indicated high level of satisfaction about "Instructor was readily available for consultation with students" and 9% were disagree, 89% respondents of distance learning indicated high level of satisfaction about "Assignments/projects appropriate for course" and 11% were disagree while 87% respondents of traditional learning indicated high level of satisfaction about "Assignments/projects appropriate for course " and 13% were disagree, 79% respondents of distance learning indicated high level of satisfaction about "Accessibility of resources to complete assignments" and 21% were disagree while 91% respondents of traditional learning indicated high level of satisfaction about "Accessibility of resources to complete assignments" and 9% were disagree, 76% respondents of distance learning indicated high level of satisfaction about "Amount of student to student interaction" and 24% were disagree while 93% respondents of traditional learning indicated high level of satisfaction about "Amount of student to student interaction" and 7% were disagree, 90% respondents of distance learning indicated high level of satisfaction about "The degree to which the student is satisfied with the course and what has been learnt" and 10% were disagree while 91% respondents of traditional learning indicated high level of satisfaction about "The degree to which the student is satisfied with the course and what has been learnt" and 9% were disagree, So over all respondents showed high level of satisfaction with each of aspects except items No. 3,7,8. There was slightly difference related to satisfaction with timely feedback to students (DL 75.0, TL 91.0), accessibility of resources to complete assignments (DL 79.0, TL 91.0) and amount of student to student interaction (DL 76.0, TL 93.0) between both groups.

CONCLUSIONS

With the limited spaces in the formal conventional education systems there is need to identify other educational programmes which would enhance meeting the demand for higher education.

The teacher role is also very important in learning environment. Student seeks from teacher and their timely response positively influences student satisfaction. The group interactions initiated by teachers are very effective and students enjoy the learning environment.

Government should support the establishment of Open Distance Learning centres for higher education with appropriate legislation. Distance learning should be seen as a positive strategy for meeting the demands for education, an instrument for poverty alleviation and economic empowerment.

Hence it has become necessary for Government and Non Governmental Organizations to organize and manage Open and Distance Learning programmes. The beneficiary of distance learning are the students, if they are not satisfied then the chances of successful implementation of distance learning environment is not possible. Student, teacher and instructional technological factors are the main points that lead towards student satisfaction.

If these factors are positively entertained then satisfaction will increase otherwise, it leads to student disappointment.

BIODATA and CONTACT ADDRESSES of AUTHORS

Dr Azhar MAHMOOD did M.sc (Psychology) and M.Ed from university of Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan. He obtained PhD degree in Education from National University of Modern Languages, Islamabad. He is supervising research work at the International Islamic University, Islamabad and teaching at Master and Mphil levels. His areas of interest are Educational Psychology, Early Childhood, Guidance and Counseling, Research Methods and Statistics. He has presented number of research papers at national and international education conference. He is a part time tutor of Allama Iqbal Open University(Distance & Non formal Education University Islamabad.

Dr. Azhar MAHMOOD
Lecturer
International Islamic University Islamabad , PAKISTAN
+92-51-9019407
Email: azhar.mahmood62@yahoo.com

Sheikh Tariq MAHMOOD is a Lecturer in International Islamic university Islamabad. He did master in Educational Planning and Management and Mphil (Education) from Allama Iqbal Open University Islamabad. He is a scholar of PhD in Preston University. He is also coordinator of Allama Iqbal Open University Islamabad.

Sheikh Tariq MAHMOOD
Lecturer
International Islamic University, PAKISTAN
092-51-9019406
Email: tariq_iiui@hotmail.com

Dr Allah Bakhsh MALIK holds a Ph.D degree in Educational Administration and Teacher Education from the Institute of Education and Research new campus Punjab University, Lahore Pakistan. He also obtained a master degree in Educational Administration from the American University of Beirut, Lebanon. He has held teaching, administrative and research assignments in his career. He is supervising research work at the National University of Modern Languages Islamabad and teaching at master & Ph.D levels, has published about 2 dozen articles in educational magazines attended numerous workshops, delivered talks and worked in educational institutes at Doha Qatar and Iran.

Dr. Allah Bakhsh MALIK
Head Department of Education
National University of Modern, Languages, Islamabad, PAKISTAN
092-51-9257646#148
Email: edu_numl@yahoo.com

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